

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Populating Pee-wee's Playhouse: Swazzle creates 19 puppets for Pee-wee Herman's triumphant return

**LOS ANGELES, CA – January 18, 2010** – Glendale, CA-based puppet company Swazzle has re-created many of the classic puppet characters from *Pee-wee's Playhouse* and built a handful of new puppets for *The Pee-wee Herman Show*, now playing at Club Nokia in downtown Los Angeles. Directed by Obie Award winner Alex Timbers and starring Paul Reubens, Lynne Stewart, John Paragon and Phil LaMarr, the stage show reunites Pee-wee Herman with many of his puppet pals from the hit television series *Pee-wee's Playhouse*.

That show was appointment television for Swazzle Creative Directors Sean and Patrick Johnson as kids, so when they learned of plans for a stage show, the brothers jumped at the chance to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime production. Swazzle's team worked with design consultant Jimmy Cuomo and puppet producers The Chiodo Brothers to build Clockey, Randy, the Flowers, the Fish, Pterri, ShamWow and Cowboy Curtis' horse, Ginger. "Working on this show is a dream come true. When I was 9 years old watching *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, I never dreamed that I would get to work with Pee-wee Herman one day," says Patrick.

*The Pee-wee Herman Show* features hand puppets, rod puppets, marionettes and walk-around costumes, and each posed unique building challenges. Sean, Patrick and fellow puppet builders Russ Walko and Artie Esposito worked round the clock carving foam, dyeing fleece, and stitching Spandex to complete the puppets on a demanding schedule.

The marionettes proved to be particularly challenging. For example, Pterri the Pterodactyl has to fly in from the ceiling, swoop around the room, and crash-land—a vertical distance of more than 20 feet. Swazzle relied on the advice of UNIMA-award winning puppetry consultant Basil Twist, whose idea for a split controller was essential to pulling off the stunt.

In addition to building 19 puppets for *The Pee-wee Herman Show*, Swazzle provided all of the puppeteers. Working as Puppeteer Coordinator, Sean assembled a team whose combined credits include work for The Jim Henson Company, The Walt Disney Company, the Muppets and the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta. "The puppetry in the show is challenging," says Sean. "I worked from the top of my list to pull in the most talented puppeteers in Los Angeles."

Because so many different forms of puppetry are employed in the show, puppeteers are hidden everywhere—behind, beneath, on and high above the stage. Several of the characters are performed by multiple puppeteers, who trade off or work together depending on the puppet's location and method of operation. At one point in the show, five puppeteers work together to perform Pterri as he crash-lands as a marionette and pops up as a hand puppet.

In addition to Sean Johnson (Pterri, Randy, ShamWow, the Fish, Mr. Knucklehead) and Patrick Johnson (Globey, Pterri, Mr. Knucklehead), the show features the puppetry of Artie Esposito (Chairry), Russ Walko (Conky), Carla Rudy (Pterri, Randy, ShamWow, Mr. Window, Mr. Knucklehead), Victoria Johnson (Magic Screen), Haley Jenkins (Ginger, Pterri, the Flowers, Mr. Knucklehead, Magic Screen), and Erik Kuska (Clockey, Mr. Window, Mr. Knucklehead).

Swazzle's team members have spent years honing their puppet-building and performing skills in live puppet shows for libraries and schools, along with stage and screen projects for clients like Patton Oswalt, Jim Henson's

Creature Shop, W!ldbrain/The Dan Clark Company, and Overbrook Entertainment. *The Pee-wee Herman Show* is the next leap forward for this young puppet company as it continues to develop and expand.

### **About Swazzle**

Founded in 2004 by twin brothers Sean and Patrick Johnson, Swazzle is a Glendale, CA-based company specializing in puppetry for film, television and the stage. Together with their troupe of professional puppeteers they have performed hundreds of shows in venues across California.

Sean and Patrick have worked with leading children's entertainment companies including The Jim Henson Company, PBS Kids Sprout, The Walt Disney Company and The Baby Einstein Company. They also teach puppetry technique to actors and comedians from The Groundlings for The Jim Henson Company.

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